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## MEMORANDUM

Khmer Communist FirepowerSummary

1. Since August 1973, the Khmer Communists (KC) are estimated to have expended more than 3,000 large caliber howitzer, mortar and rocket rounds against government positions and cities. Although the period included some of the heaviest shelling of the war, KC firepower -- with one exception -- has not been decisive. Unless the North Vietnamese equip the KC with large numbers of howitzers and field guns, and provide extensive training, this situation is unlikely to change.

Strategy and Tactics

2. KC artillery\* deployment provides support for the major battlefields in the southern, southwestern, and central parts of Cambodia. Howitzers and mortars are dispersed in independent sections of 1 to 3 tubes with the largest concentration around Phnom Penh (see Table 1), while the overwhelming majority of rockets are located in the capital area. This deployment has remained relatively static, in large part because their most important firepower component -- the 105 -- is difficult to transport without heavy trucks and good roads. In addition, most artillery sections are assigned or attached to infantry units -- usually regiments or divisions -- or local battle-field commands.

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\* The KC employ four large caliber, high trajectory weapons in an artillery role -- 105-mm howitzers (105s), 120-mm mortars (120s) and 107/122-mm rockets (107s and 122s). All other weapons held by the KC are smaller and suitable only for organic unit support.

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3. In practice, the KC use their firepower in two principal roles -- harassment and siege fire -- rather than in combined operations with infantry units. During the last nine months, more than 20 percent of all attacks by fire (ABFs) have been ineffective harassing attacks in areas where major battles were not underway. These attacks averaged only about eight rounds -- barely enough for even experienced crews to adjust fire on target.

4. When larger artillery concentrations are available for shelling major FANK positions, the KC employ their firepower to try to demoralize the FANK defenders and civilian populace. The best example of this is the sustained attacks on the city of Phnom Penh from late January to mid-February when the KC fired more than 1,000 mixed rounds -- the most concentrated fire of the war. This fire was aimed at populated areas and designed to produce panic in the capital, but it failed to do so. The same pattern of concentrated fire -- with similar results -- occurred at Kompong Cham in August and September and at Lovek in May. Indeed, in only one instance has KC artillery fire been decisive. At the Lovek Training Center, the fortuitous placement of a few rounds destroyed the garrison's ammunition dump, forcing the center's evacuation.

5. For the most part, the KC have failed to use their firepower to neutralize FANK defensive positions prior to infantry assaults -- the most important military role for artillery. Moreover, artillery fire, when it has been directed at FANK positions, has generally preceded ground attacks by such extensive periods that the advantage has been lost. As a result, KC infantry units in combat generally must rely on organic mortars, hand-held rockets, and recoilless rifles for fire support. In this respect, the KC's switch to large unit attacks was premature. Indeed, the recent KC shift to a "provincial" strategy, which takes advantage of FANK's weakness in outlying areas, may have been a tacit admission that, combined with their other shortcomings, they cannot win conventional battles such as those fought around Phnom Penh in 1973 without adequate fire support.

#### Capabilities

6. Even if the KC used their firepower, however, to support ground attacks against FANK positions, the impact probably would be limited. Their artillery inventory (see

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Table 2) is small in relation to their force structure, making it difficult to mass fire against individual targets or provide support for low priority battlefields. For example, government-held areas in the Northwest have been almost totally free from shellings. Moreover, FANK enjoys about a 20 to 1 firepower advantage and the luxury of air support, and thus can sustain relatively heavy counter-battery fire. This in turn makes the KC even more reluctant to concentrate weapons because of the danger of losing a substantial part of their scarce resources.

A major constraint is the composition of the KC arsenal. Of the four weapons they use as artillery, only the 105 is suited to effective support of large-scale operations against FANK. The 122 has about the same range as the 105 (see Table 3), but it is much less accurate, especially when fired from the crude, locally manufactured platforms generally used by the KC. The 107 suffers from the same lack of accuracy and a shorter range, while the 120 has the needed accuracy, but its range -- about half that of the 105 -- makes it more suited for use as an organic unit support weapon.

8. KC reliance on 105s for combat artillery support, however, poses a number of problems. Because ammunition and spare parts must be captured or purchased on the black market, resupply is uncertain, and shortages occur frequently. At Kompong Cham and Prey Veng, for example, even though rounds were available, the KC were forced to fire them without fuses, thereby precluding detonation on impact. Moreover, as tubes are used, accuracy declines as the rifling is worn down, and few, if any, replacements are available. Stocks of the relatively sophisticated aiming devices needed to accurately place fire are probably inadequate as well.

9. Finally, little is known about KC internal training capabilities, but they probably are minimal. FANK, for example, did not develop effective fire support or a viable internal training capability until mid-1973, despite

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10. The impact of inadequate training is two-fold. First, accurate fire is difficult if crews are not proficient in aiming techniques or if they are not supported by competent forward observers. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] Second, the 105 requires periodic cleaning, lubrication, and adjustment, and with gun crews not thoroughly familiar with the operation of their weapons, improper maintenance rapidly reduces combat effectiveness and could cause a decline in the operational inventory.

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#### Prospects

11. Until they integrate artillery and infantry operations, the KC will remain essentially a guerrilla force engaged in main force battles. Moreover, any substantial improvement in KC fire support capabilities must come from the North Vietnamese. Only they can furnish the KC the large-bore Communist howitzers and field guns needed to properly support ground operations. Weapons would have to be provided in significant quantities, ammunition resupply would have to be assured, and extensive training in both weapons fire and combined operations would be required -- something the North Vietnamese have been unwilling to do.

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Table 1

Probable Areas of Deployment of KC 105-mm  
Howitzers and 120-mm Mortars

<u>Area</u>	<u>105s</u>	<u>120s</u>
Phnom Penh	3	4
Lovek	2	2
Kampot	2	2
Kompong Speu	2	1
Takeo	1	2
Veal Renh	2	0
Prey Veng	2	2
Kompong Cham	2	0
Kompong Thom	1	2
Siem Reap	0	2

Table 2

Estimated KC Artillery  
Inventory - June 1974

<u>Type</u>	<u>Number of Weapons</u>	<u>Number of Rounds</u>
105-mm howitzer	17	2,000
107-mm rocket	NA	1,500
120-mm mortar	22	8,500
122-mm rocket	NA	200

Table 3

Maximum Range and Probable  
Aiming Error for KC Artillery

<u>Weapon</u>	<u>Maximum Range (in meters)</u>	<u>Probable Aiming Error at Maximum Range (in meters)</u>
105-mm howitzer	11,155	7 (deflection) 61 (range)
107-mm rocket	8,300	N.A.
120-mm mortar	5,700	24 (deflection) 50 (range)
122-mm rocket	10,973	202 (circular)



Distribution:

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